

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY



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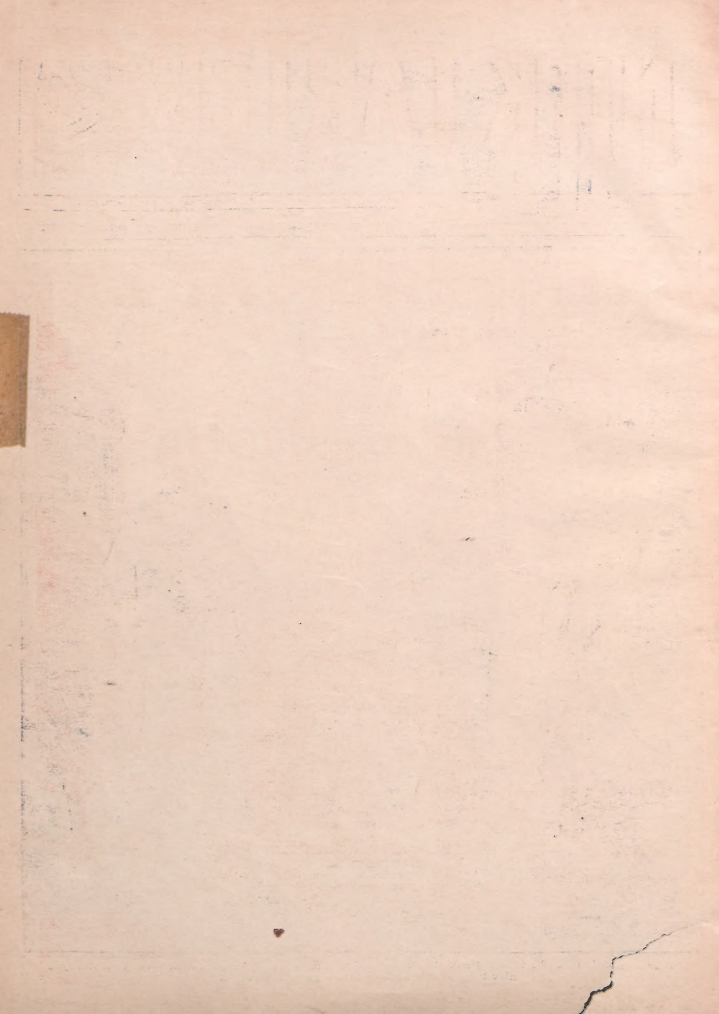
Price, Five Cents.

AN EMPEROR AT BAY

OR
NICK CARTER DEFIES THE CZAR



"Your demand to me?" cried the Czar. "Yes, your majesty, my demand," replied Nick Carter, "is that you give to us your personal signature and assurance!"





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No. 380.

NEW YORK, April 9, 1904.

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AN EMPEROR AT BAY;

OR,

Nick Carter Defies the Czar.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE SMILE OF A SIREN.

"Nicholas Carter! Nicholas Carter! Cable message for Nicholas Carter! NICH-O-LAS CAR-R-R-R—TER-R-R!"

Nick was seated in one corner of the waiting room of the station reading a copy of the *Figaro* when the man entered and walked slowly from one end of the room to the other, crying his name and announcing a cable message, but the detective never once raised his head or even took his eyes from the columns of the paper he was reading.

Most people would have been startled into some motion that would have tended to betray identity, or at least interest in the name and the message thus suddenly announced, but not so the detective.

He did not wink an eye or move a muscle, and the keenest scrutiny, if bent upon him at that instant,

would have thought him either deaf or utterly oblivious to the sound of the name that was so emphatically shouted through the building.

Presently, when the man who was making the announcement passed through an aisle which brought him almost in touching contact with the detective, Nick raised his head lazily and peered curiously at him, but with the air of one who had been disturbed in his reading rather than of interest in what was said; and when the man had passed him, he resumed his reading with an audible sigh of relief.

"I suppose there are at least half a dozen agents of the Russian Third Section in this room, watching to see who looks up and takes notice," he thought to himself. "They are determined that I shall not pass the Russian frontier if they can find a way to prevent me, but one thing is certain, they will never spot me in that way; not while I am still in my right senses."

The station in which he was awaiting the departure of a train was Marseilles, and he intended journeying from there direct to Paris.

It would seem that he had selected rather a round-about method of reaching his final destination, which was St. Petersburg, for he had come direct from Tokio, in Japan; but the mission upon which he was occupied was one of exceeding delicacy, and he had selected his route with great care, convinced that the few days extra that would be required to reach St. Petersburg by the one he had chosen, would be more than compensated for in the advantages to be obtained.

At the moment when we discovered him seated in the waiting room of the railway station, Nick Carter was acting in the capacity of a special and private messenger from the Mikado of Japan to the Czar of Russia.

More than that, the expedition was entirely a secret one.

It had been undertaken without the connivance of the ministers of either country, and entirely without the knowledge and approval of the men who were supposed to conduct the international affairs of both countries.

Not a single human being in all Japan, save the mikado himself, Ten-Ichi and Nick Carter, was supposed to know about the undertaking, and yet, the detective had not left the country of the lotus flower before he was aware of the fact that a close watch was being maintained on every hand, to discover his identity.

"The tentacles of the Russian Third Section reach out in every direction," he had said to the mikado before he took his departure, "and there is little doubt that in some way it will be discovered that I am on my way to the czar. Therefore, I will prefer to go my own way and meet whatever emergencies may arise, in the manner I think best. When my work is done and my mission accomplished, I will report back here to you, but until then, you can assist me best by forgetting that I exist at all."

"You know, of course, that you cannot cross the

frontier into Russia, without a passport?" said the mikado.

"Certainly."

"And that, under the circumstances it is impossible for me to provide you with one?"

"Yes; but be assured that I should not accept one at your hands, for this work, even if you had hundreds of them at your disposal."

"Then how will you enter Russia?"

"I will find a way, sir."

And so, Nick had departed on his errand.

He had journeyed by way of the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and thence through the Mediterranean to Marseilles. Now it was his intention to go to Paris, and in that city of opportunities to discover a means—but in what way he could not determine until after his arrival there—to materialize a passport out of nothing.

Presently the train that was to take him to the French capital was announced, and he took his place in one of the compartments.

The detective's disguise was a simple one, for, with the exception that his hair was tinged with gray and that he wore a short and bristling mustache of the same hue, he was barely disguised at all. His dress was that of an English gentleman tourist, and his manner and deportment fitted the dress to a nicety.

During the two or three minutes that intervened between the time of his taking his place in the compartment and the starting of the train for the north, Nick fancied that he was to have the place to himself, although he had made no effort to do so, such as feeling the guard for that purpose. He did not wish even to seem to avoid companionship.

The point was just this: He was convinced, since the calling of the cable message at the station, that the Russian ministry was on the lookout for him, but he was equally sure that they knew nothing of his whereabouts. He had no doubt that the same message had been called out at the Marseilles station every day for a week, and would continue to be called just before the departure of trains for an indefinite period, in the hope that if he happened to be present, he would

betray himself; and he also had no doubt that the same ceremony of calling his name was taking place at a dozen other points of arrival for passengers from the East.

Connivance between Russia and the officials of the cable companies was not necessary to accomplish this feat. It was only necessary to send a cable to each one of the stations, addressed to Nicholas Carter, and to direct that the cable be called until the message was claimed. It was an easy matter for the agents of the Third Section to keep watch when the messages were called.

Nick's idea that he was to be alone in his compartment was not to be realized, however.

The train was on the point of moving out of the station when the door was thrust open and a woman entered and dropped breathlessly upon the seat opposite. Her hand baggage was quickly thrust in after her, the door was closed, and the train sped on its way.

Nick, perceiving that her baggage was piled indiscriminately around her in the utmost confusion, and, moreover, that there was considerable of it, took the opportunity, while she was recovering her breath, to arrange it for her, and he could see that she was watching him while he did so, although the spotted veil that was drawn down over her face almost concealed her features from him.

When he had finished the task she thanked him.

"Thank you. You are very kind," she said, in English, with a touch of foreign accent that rendered her enunciation unusually attractive and musical. "You go to Paris?"

"Yes," replied Nick.

"Then we will be many hours in the society of each other. No? Ah! it is dreadful to be alone, is it not? I hope you are not dismayed to find that you have a woman for a sharer of this compartment."

"Not at all. I am delighted, I assure you."

"Ah! that is very gallant; but I am afraid it is not true. You are thinking, for example, 'What a dreadful bore. Here is a woman who has thrust herself upon me. Doubtless she will not let me smoke; and

just now she is talking, talking, talking; ah! I wonder if she will ever stop talking.' Confess, now, that is what you are thinking."

"I can positively assure you that I was thinking nothing of the sort," said Nick, laughing.

"Very well. I will believe you. And you need have no such thoughts, for I will permit you to smoke to your heart's content on the one condition that you will not smoke a pipe, for that I could not endure; and I will assure you that presently I shall take a nap, and that then you will not be bothered by my talking."

"I will take you at your word, then, madam, and smoke a cigar."

"Very good. Thank you. And, then, monsieur——"

"Well, madam?"

"You are English, are you not?"

"More American than English, I think," replied Nick.

"And I—well, I am afraid that I am more Russian than French, although I was born in Paris. But I am the wife of a Russian, and I suppose I am, therefore, Russian. No? Will you be horrified and shocked if I—if I venture to join you in your smoke by enjoying a Russian cigarette?"

"Not at all, madam."

She opened a small bag which she had carried in her hand when she entered the compartment and took therefrom a jeweled cigarette case and a box of fuses. In another moment she was leaning back in the corner, the picture of contentment while curling wreathes of smoke circled above her head.

Nick looked on smilingly, but the woman seemed to have forgotten his existence; nor, as the moments flew past, did she address him again but continued to smoke cigarette after cigarette with the air of one who, having long been deprived of a much-craved luxury, has at last found an opportunity to gratify her longing.

Presently she seemed to notice his regard of her, and she smiled back at him.

"You see, sir, my loquacity has vanished," she said. "The truth is I paid that guard exorbitantly to put me into a compartment by myself in order that I might

have an opportunity to smoke, and when I discovered that you were here, well, I was disgusted. I resolved that I would smoke anyway. If you had been a Russian or a Frenchman, I would not have hesitated, but I thought at first that you were an Englishman, and I know that they think a woman who smokes is approaching the last stages of depravity. Then, when you said that you were more American than English, I resolved to try it. Are you shocked?"

"Not at all."

"That is very good of you. I see you have finished your cigar; won't you try one of these cigarettes?"

"Thank you, no. I will light another cigar."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"As you please," she said, "but I am certain that you will never know the full deliciousness of tobacco until you have smoked one of these. I have them made especially for my own use. See!"

She opened the small bag at her side, and Nick could see that it was half filled with boxes of cigarettes.

Selecting one of the boxes, she began refilling her case, and then noticing that he had not yet lighted his cigar, she again pressed one of the cigarettes upon him.

"Do me the favor," she said, smiling brightly and fixing her great, round eyes upon him with an expression so bewitchingly and humorously pathetic that the detective laughed outright. "Really, you will never know what real smoking is until you have tried one of these."

"Thank you," said Nick, smiling, "I will take one."

"That is very good of you," she said, passing her box of fuses across to him. "When you have quite finished it, I shall ask you to tell me exactly what you think of it. In the meantime, in order that you may give yourself up to the full enjoyment of the best smoke you ever had, I will not talk to you; I will read."

She settled herself back in the corner, holding her book so that it half concealed her exquisitely beautiful face—so that only her brilliant eyes gleamed over the top of it upon him from time to time when she raised them to see if he was still smoking. And he watched them dreamily while the train sped on its way—dreamily and drowsily, until he had nearly finished the

cigarette; and then she seemed to fade away out of his range of vision.

His head dropped back against the cushions and his eyelids came together. The cigarette fell from his nerveless fingers, and Nick Carter, the man who was never taken off his guard, slept, while the woman in the opposite corner of the compartment slowly put aside her book and watched him with an enigmatical smile upon her beautiful face.

CHAPTER II.

THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN YOU WANT TO BE ALONE

It was late in the afternoon when the detective opened his eyes from the sleep into which he had fallen after smoking the cigarette, and the principal emotion he felt at the time was astonishment to think that he had permitted himself to sleep at all.

He awoke very quietly, and without moving, and perceiving that his companion, who still occupied the corner of the compartment opposite him, had not discovered that he was awake, he kept his eyes half closed in order to study her while she believed that he was still asleep.

Even then it did not occur to Nick Carter that he had been sleeping for hours and that the greater part of the distance between Marseilles and Paris had been traversed while he was in the land of nod. His impression was that he had simply dozed and that only a few moments had elapsed since he had permitted his head to sink back against the cushions, and himself to drift away to the land of nod.

It is doubtful, if he had realized all that, if he would have taken the circumstances as quietly as he did.

A second glance bestowed upon his companion convinced him that she was also sleeping, quietly, but surely, and he raised himself to a sitting posture and regarded her more earnestly.

Then, too, he became aware of the startling fact.

When he accepted the cigarette from her hand, the sun had been shining into the compartment on the right side; now it had somehow transferred itself to the left side, and for an instant he could not disabuse

his mind of the idea that the train had somehow turned about and was traveling in a direction opposite to the one in which he desired to go.

Then he looked at his watch.

He nearly exclaimed aloud when he realized what time it was, for the hands on the dial pointed to three in the afternoon, whereas it had been ten, or about ten in the morning when he accepted the cigarette.

Like a flash it became clear to him that he had been drugged, and that the woman opposite, now sleeping so peacefully, had done the thing purposely, and with some well-defined object in view.

But what could have been that object? Obviously she had no fear of the consequences of what she had done, else she would have taken advantage of the one or two stops that the train had made while he was asleep, to leave it, or at least to have gone into another compartment.

But she had done neither of these things. Instead, she had calmly permitted herself to sink into slumber almost as profound as his had been.

Here was a puzzle for him, indeed!

Cautiously he began a systematic search of his pockets, only to discover that nothing was missing, and that as far as he was able to determine, nothing had been disturbed. In fact, he was convinced that she had not even searched him or the one satchel he carried with him, for it remained where he had placed it when he entered the compartment at Marseilles, and a careful study of its position and also of the key that was in the pocket of his waistcoat, assured him that it had not been opened.

Why then had she drugged him?

"At all events," he thought, "two can play at the game she has been at, and I'll make a little investigation on my own account."

In examining his pockets to discover if the contents had been disturbed, he had come upon his vial of chloroform with which he was always provided, and now he removed it, and having unscrewed the stopper, he held the vial for a moment so that she would inhale the fumes that escaped from it.

"Just enough so that my movements will not disturb

you," he murmured, "but not enough so that you will know afterward that it has been administered."

Having satisfied himself that she had inhaled a sufficient quantity for his purposes—she was resting so quietly in her corner that it was not necessary to change her position—he commenced a rapid, but thorough examination of her effects.

"Not an exceedingly courteous or gentlemanly thing to do," he muttered, "but I must go far enough to determine, if possible, why you undertook to stupefy me. If you are a spy of the Russian government and have been delegated to watch me, I must know it, although even if you have searched me and done it so dexterously that I can find no trace of the fact, you have discovered nothing, for I have not a thing in my possession, in my pockets or in my one satchel, which could betray my identity, or tell you from whence I came or whither I am going. Nevertheless, you had a distinct purpose in drugging me, and I must find out what that purpose was and is."

He paused before beginning his search and looked tensely upon her again.

"Truly she is a most beautiful creature," he soliloquized, "and it is quite evident, too, that she is high up in the social order of things. A French woman, married to a Russian prince, I have no doubt. There are many of those landed princes in Russia, who have no connection with the reigning family, but who are descended from the petty rulers of times gone by. But why is she traveling alone, and why did she drug me?"

He opened the small bag that rested on the seat beside her; the one that was almost filled with cigarettes.

Inside it, in addition to the cigarettes, was a card-case, one side of which was filled with thousand-franc notes—he did not stop to count them—and the other, with her cards.

One of these latter he abstracted and placed in his own pocket, for it contained her name and two addresses, one in Paris, and the other in St. Petersburg, and it told him, moreover, that she was indeed a Russian princess of the class that ranks about the same as a countess in England.

In the bottom of the receptacle, underneath the

cigarettes, was a double handful of mixed Russian, French and English gold. In short, the bag itself, with the cardcase, contained the equivalent of eight or ten thousand dollars in American money.

Attached to her wrist by a slender chain was a small gold reticule, and that, he discovered, contained some smaller change, a dainty handkerchief and a letter which had been stuffed hastily a-top of the other contents.

For a moment Nick hesitated with the letter in his hand, and then he returned it to the reticule which he closed with a snap.

"Not yet," he said, aloud. "I'd rather take my chances against anything that is likely to occur at this woman's hands than to read her letter in this way. I won't do that yet."

Then he turned his eyes upon the remaining baggage that she had brought into the coach with her, but here also his spirit balked.

"I cannot find that she has disturbed a thing in my case, and I'm blowed if I will go through her baggage in this surreptitious manner," was his decision. "I'll let her wake up, and then I'll put the question plainly to her. I suppose that letter would tell me a lot if I were willing to read it, but I won't do that until I have a better reason than I think I have now."

He opened the window of the coach so that the cool air could play on the woman's face, and then, having lighted a cigar he composed himself in his own corner to watch her.

After a while her eyelids began to flicker, and presently when he saw that she was on the point of waking he spoke to her.

"Madam," he said, "haven't you slept long enough? We will arrive at Paris shortly."

"Quite long enough," she replied, rousing and suppressing a yawn. Then she smiled brightly upon him and straightening her body, thrust her head out of the window to inhale the keen outside air.

"You looked so comfortable in your corner," she said, presently, turning again in his direction, "that I went to sleep also. Did you enjoy your nap?"

"Immensely, if one could call it by that name. I

think, myself, that slumber would be a more fitting term, for I must have slept at least four hours."

She laughed with unfeigned amusement.

"You should thank me for that," she said.

"Indeed? Why?"

"Haven't you discovered? Don't you suspect?"

"Perhaps. But tell me what you mean?"

For reply she opened the bag at her side and took therefrom two cigarettes, apparently, at first glance, exactly alike, but on closer inspection different in that one of them was waxed at one end.

"See," she said, passing them across to him. "These appear to be the same, with the difference that one is waxed at the end, but in that fact consists all the difference in the world, for the one that is waxed is also flavored with Indian hasheesh. It was because you inhaled the fumes of hasheesh that you slept. You are indebted to me for a delightful sleep, sir." And she laughed contagiously again.

"And for nothing more?" asked Nick.

"What more could you desire, sir?"

"In effect, you drugged me, without my knowledge or consent, did you not?"

"I suppose so," and she smiled up at him again.

"Why should you do such a thing as that?"

"Simply because you looked very tired, and——"

"Well? And what?"

"I wanted to be alone. Did I not tell you that I bribed the guard to put me into a compartment by myself?"

"Certainly you did."

"Well, were you not here? I wished to be alone. You were here. The only way in which I could be alone with you here was to make you sleep. After you had inhaled the hasheesh and had succumbed to its effects, I was as much alone as if you had been in——"

"In the grave," suggested Nick.

"B-r-r-r! Not quite that," and she shuddered.

"Do you always go prepared to drug unpleasant companions, if they chance to be in your way or to interfere with your plans?" asked Nick.

"Not at all," she replied, easily. "I always have those cigarettes, for I use them whenever I desire :

quiet sleep with pleasant dreams. It was merely a sudden inspiration that determined me to induce you to try one of them. Did you not have pleasant dreams, sir?"

"Infinitely pleasant. Would you like to hear what it was I dreamed?"

"Yes, indeed. Tell me," she replied.

CHAPTER III.

THE FUGITIVE PRINCESS.

In that instant it had flashed upon Nick that perhaps he would have done well if he had read the letter in her reticule, for it was plain to him at once that it had been given to her at one of the stations where the train had stopped while he was sleeping, and that doubtless she had given out another one when she received it. So her reason for wishing to be alone was apparent. It was simply that she did not wish to be observed when she exchanged the letters.

"I dreamed," he said, slowly, permitting his eyes to wander out through the window while he talked in order that he might seem to be recalling his dream instead of speaking from a certain knowledge of events that he had gleaned, "that just at the moment when the train was on the point of leaving Marseilles, the door of this compartment was thrust open to admit a beautiful woman."

She nodded, brightly, evidently amused.

"Is this really a dream, monsieur," she inquired, "or merely a dexterous method of conveying flattery?"

"It is a dream," he asserted, "as you will discover as I proceed."

"Splendid. I am all attention."

"The beautiful woman was a princess, a Russian princess, who had absented herself from her friends without their knowledge, and who had traveled to Marseilles, or elsewhere, for a purpose which she did not care to have others know. It was a comparatively easy matter for her to get to Marseilles, unattended, without discovery, and it was also comparatively easy for her to return to Paris in the same way, always provided she could secure a compartment to herself and

that she was not recognized at the station; therefore——"

Nick hesitated, and turned his eyes upon her in a smile, for she was leaning forward to catch each word he uttered.

"Well? Therefore——" she said, breathlessly.

"I see that I have interested you," he said.

"Very much indeed," she replied, somewhat coldly. "Please go on."

"In order to accomplish that," he continued, "she drove to the station at Marseilles in a closed carriage, called a guard, bribed him to secure for her a compartment by herself, and at the very last moment before the train was to start she crossed the platform and hastened into the train, so that it had already started when her foot was upon the step."

"You are a wonderful dreamer, monsieur," she commented.

"Ah, yes. But you have not yet heard all my dream."

"But I am waiting to hear it."

"To her consternation, she discovered that another had entered that same compartment, and she was for a moment dismayed; but suddenly she remembered her cigarettes, and she decided that her beauty and her brilliant powers of conversation would enable her to induce her unwelcome companion to smoke one of them."

"Very good indeed, monsieur; but I have already told you that much."

"True; but listen. She laid aside her natural reserve; she threw conventionality to the winds—she even became, as she herself confessed at the time, loquacious, with the result that her companion did accept one of her cigarettes and did succumb to its effects."

"Excellent. Well? Your dream interests me. I cannot help wondering how much more of the truth you dreamed."

"It is the truth, then, so far, madam?"

"Undoubtedly; but go on."

"There was a station midway between Marseilles and Paris, where the princess especially desired to remain unobserved. It was for this reason more than

any other that she was determined that her companion should sleep."

"How remarkable!" exclaimed the woman, and Nick could see that she was getting angry.

"Yes; is it not?"

"Why, according to your strange dream, did she wish to be alone at that particular station?"

"Because a person was to appear there who was to deliver a letter to her through the window of the compartment, and to whom she was also to deliver something."

The woman started forward with a little cry of amazement and genuine anger gleamed in her matchless eyes.

"You were not sleeping," she exclaimed. "You were shamming!"

"I was dreaming," said Nick, calmly.

"You are lying now," she returned, coldly.

Nick shrugged his shoulders, and continued in the same calm tone:

"All this being accomplished, the princess no longer had a reason for desiring to be alone, and perceiving that her companion bade fair to sleep for some time longer, she composed herself to sleep also, doubtless inducing the effect by smoking one of her hashesh cigarettes. Her work was done and her companion might awaken when he chose."

"Her work was very poorly done, monsieur."

"Indeed? Why?"

"Never mind why. Perhaps your dream also told you the name of this Russian princess."

"Certainly. She was the Princess Marie Theresa Stevanislaus, *née* de Plantois."

Nick uttered the name, coupled with her maiden name, quite calmly, and was entirely unprepared for the effect it produced upon her, for she sprang to her feet with a bound and darted toward one of her satchels which Nick had not touched, and which was at the other end of her side of the compartment.

He knew from the expression of her face when she started forward that she was in a dangerous mood, and believed that she meant to secure a weapon of some kind which she carried in the valise, so he put out one

hand and detained her as she was in the act of opening it.

"What would you do, madam?" he asked.

"Do?" she cried, furiously, "I would kill you. I wish I had done so while you slept."

"Why?" he asked.

"Why? Because you are a spy! Because you were sent here to watch me! Because, after all my trouble and care, you have found me out! Because my own life will be sacrificed if you— Ah, bah! You ask me why, when you know so much better than I why. But I do not know why. Almost everything I have said to you has been the result of guesswork. I never in my life heard your name mentioned until I uttered it myself, and I haven't the least idea why you chose to pass a note from the window, or to receive one through it."

"I wish I could believe you."

"It is true. Furthermore, the fact that you did either of those things does not interest me at all. I presume you had your own reasons for doing those things, just as I have reasons for doing things. They are your own and you are welcome to them."

"But how did you know my name?"

"From your card. Listen, before you permit yourself to be angry again."

"Well?"

"When I awoke and discovered that I had been dragged I had reasons for supposing that you would not do such a thing without a well-defined purpose."

"Naturally."

"And as you were also sleeping, I seized the opportunity thus afforded to make some investigations on my own account."

"And searched my baggage," she said, scornfully.

"No, madam, I did not do that. I started to do it, but I desisted. I did open the bag that is there at your elbow, and I did take from your cardcase a card with your name upon it. I did look into the reticule that hangs at your wrist, and I saw the letter that is there; but I did not remove the letter. I merely discovered that it had been crammed in on top of other things I had seen you using since you entered this com-

partment, and therefore decided that you had received it while I was sleeping. That discovery told me why you wished me to sleep, which was all that I cared to know, so I searched no farther. Your secret is still your secret. I have no idea what it is and I have no wish to know."

The woman's face had cleared perceptibly while Nick was talking, for there was that in his manner which convinced her, even against her will, and when he had concluded she leaned forward and said, impulsively:

"I believe you, monsieur."

"Thank you," replied Nick. "I am glad, for I have told you the truth."

"I believe you," she repeated. "You say you do not care to know why I wished you to sleep while I exchanged messages with another through the window, so we need not touch upon that more than that I wish to assure you that it was part of a plot to save a human life from sacrifice. I think I have succeeded, although I have risked much, my own life and my reputation as well, in the attempt. And, monsieur, the danger for me is not yet past."

"I can imagine that."

"You are an American, you say?"

"Yes."

"And a gentleman; I know that. You are, moreover, a perfect stranger to me; but—I wonder—if you would not consent to do me a service?"

"Indeed I would, if you will tell me what it is."

"Be careful how you promise, for in doing what I shall ask you will encounter danger."

"We all do that every moment of our lives, madam."

She hesitated a full minute, thinking deeply the while, and when she raised her eyes again to his he saw that there were tears in their depths.

"No," she said. "I will not ask it. It would be too much. Besides, it would be impossible. Still, sir, if I were to tell you the truth, perhaps you might assist me to secure somebody—some man, who, for a consideration— Ah! of what am I talking? I must work out the problem alone and unaided. Least of all shall I ask a stranger to help me."

"At least you can tell me your troubles, princess," said Nick, tentatively.

"No," she replied, "I cannot."

She leaned back in her corner again and lapsed into silence, with her head turned so that he could see only her profile as she peered through the window at the glistening landscape.

But after a time she turned again in his direction.

"You dreamed that my destination was Paris," she said, in a low tone, "but it is much farther away than that. It is St. Petersburg. If you can assist me to get there, undiscovered, you will save my reputation, my honor, my life, and the life and reputation of another who will some day pay the favor back to you, with interest ten-fold. I am out of Russia without permission, and I must return there, undiscovered, or the consequences will be so terrible that I shudder to think of them."

CHAPTER IV.

PLOTTING FOR PASSPORTS TO RUSSIA.

For a moment, during which absolute silence, save that made by the train as it rushed along, reigned between them, Nick looked earnestly and searchingly into the eyes of the princess; and presently, as if satisfied by the scrutiny he had made, he spoke.

"Madam," he said, "I am a man whose business it is to rely solely upon my own judgment. There are times and circumstances in my life, frequently, when but for quick discernment and almost infallible reading of character in another, I should fail in my undertakings. That quick discernment and almost infallible reading of character on my part is derived entirely from study and experience. I make use of the word 'almost,' because there have been and there probably will be again times when I have been mistaken, but whether I make mistakes or not, I can accept no other criterion for my actions than that."

"Well?" she asked, tentatively.

"You are a young woman and a beautiful woman. You are a wife and your husband is a man of prominence in Russian affairs. I do not mean to allude to your

his position, but I remember meeting and knowing a young Prince Stevanislaus—Alexander by name, or Sacha, for short—five years ago. He was then, I think, connected with the foreign office."

"You have named my husband. He was then assistant to the head of the Privy Council; he is now chief of the dreaded Third Section."

"And you are out of Russia without his knowledge or permission?"

"Yes."

"Then, indeed, you are in danger."

"Danger?" she laughed aloud. "You do not realize a tenth part of it, and you can never do so unless I tell it to you."

"But how dare you travel so? A young and beautiful woman like yourself, the cynosure of all eyes wherever you go, must be known all over Europe."

"I am; but in that very fact lies my greatest safety."

"How so, madam?"

"I have a counterpart."

"A double?"

"A twin sister—Madam de Tierney—who is so like me that our best friends do not know one from the other, when we enter a room together."

"Indeed. I have heard of such coincidences of resemblance; but they are rare. Where is your sister now?"

"In Paris."

"In Paris! How, then, is your absence from St. Petersburg explained?"

"It is not explained. At present I am supposed to be isolated in our country palace, two leagues out from St. Petersburg. I am suffering from smallpox."

"Smallpox! Great heavens!"

"It served the purpose," she said, defiantly, and as if in defense of the means she had taken to escape. "Three of our servants died of the disease; we were quarantined; I had to leave Russia for a time; my maid has had the smallpox and was immune; I could trust her if the bribe were big enough; it has been given out that I have the disease, and I am here. That is the whole story. Now, I must return. I have no passport. I cannot get one in the name of my sister, be-

cause she would betray me. She does not know that I am not in Russia at this moment, and she must not know it. After a while she will hear that she has been seen in Marseilles—and in other places as well. She will wonder, and she will telegraph to Ivan to know if I am at home. Ivan will suspect. He will investigate. If I am not there he will discover the truth. Smallpox will not deter him."

"But how did you get out of Russia?"

"Never mind that, sir. It is enough that I am out and must return—and it must be at once. Delay will be fatal. By another day my sister will have heard of my presence in this country. Moreover, she will hear it in such a way that she will know that it was I who impersonated her. We are due in Paris at eight o'clock. I must leave there at midnight."

"No," said Nick. "If you wish me to assist you we must wait till to-morrow at midnight. Then we will travel together."

"Do you mean that you have passports that will take both of us across the frontier?"

"I mean that I will find a way to procure them."

"But how?"

"Leave that to me. It shall be done."

"And you have not even told me your name, yet you are willing to do all this for me."

"Perhaps I shall ask you to do as much for me later," replied Nick. "As for my name, I am Mr. Felix Parsons of New York. Will that suffice?"

"Surely."

"And—we have half an hour yet before we leave the train—when we arrive in Paris—"

He paused, and she waited for him to continue while her eyes were fixed intently upon his. Her lips were parted and she almost held her breath. He could see, also, that her fingers twitched nervously together, clasping and unclasping their hold upon the reticule she had seized between them.

"Well?" she asked, presently, in a very apparent endeavor to speak with calmness.

"Hear me out to the end before you comment or misjudge me," continued Nick.

She nodded and he continued:

"I have many friends in Paris. When we arrive at station you will drive with me to the Hotel Concordia. I will take apartments there in the name of Monsieur and Madam Parsons. I will leave you here and go about business that needs my attention. I will not see you again before to-morrow evening. I will then have passports."

For several moments she hesitated without replying; at then—

"Why do you do this for me?" she asked. "There must be a motive."

"There is."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

"Yes, for in this matter I find that we must trust each other. I, too, am anxious to enter Russia. I, too, have no passport. It would be an easy matter for me to prepare one by applying to the chief of the detective bureau, whom I know, but I have especial reasons for not wishing him to know that I am here, or that I am going there. He would inform the chief of the Third Section, who happens to be your husband, of my intention of visiting Russia, even though he promised me faithfully not to do so. I do not want the Third Section to know that I am going here."

"Well, monsieur?"

"I could also go to the United States Minister, and through him secure the passports, but in doing that I would have to explain more than I desire shall be known. Therefore I cannot procure them in that way, rather I will not."

"Then how will you accomplish it?"

"You have furnished the means."

"I?"

"Yes; you and your beautiful sister."

The princess straightened herself haughtily.

"Please recall the fact that I have told you that my sister and I look exactly alike. Mr. Parsons," she said.

"This is hardly a time for idle compliments. I have already put myself in a measure, in your power, and if I agree to this amazing plan of yours I shall do so to a still greater extent, but I want you to understand—"

"I know perfectly well what it is that you wish me to understand, madam, so you need say no more on that subject."

"Please tell me how I have furnished the means to procure you a passport, and how my sister comes into the question?"

"I have met the Count de Tierney, your sister's husband."

"Yes? What of that?"

"Simply this: He will procure the passports for me, in his and Madam de Tierney's names."

"But then Felicia—Madam de Tierney—will know all about it and betray me, and rest assured that she will lose no time in doing so when once she does know."

"She will know nothing—neither will he—at least until after we are safely across the frontier and safe on the other side of the boundary between Germany and Russia."

"But——"

"Trust me, princess. There will be no difficulty."

"Then you are to take me to the Hotel Concordia and leave me there—leave me there at once—as Madam Parsons. To-morrow, in the evening, you are to call for me, and we are to travel through Germany and across the frontier of Russia as Count and Madam de Tierney."

"Yes."

"And after that, what, pray?"

"God knows. After that we must rely upon our astuteness and fund of resource to accomplish the remainder of the journey without accident, for I haven't a doubt that before we are well into Russia, the fraud will be discovered."

"And we will be arrested."

"Possibly; but I doubt that. I think I can outwit the Russian police. I have done it in the past and I think I can do it again."

"Who are you, sir? Tell me who you are. You are not what you seem, or what you represent yourself to be."

"For the present, madam, I am Felix Parsons. To-morrow I shall be Count de Tierney—like him to fact, that even you will not know the difference until I

“speak and assure you; but always, you will find that I am your friend. You must not forget that in this matter I am quite as greatly indebted to you as you can be to me, so the obligations are equal; and more, I have not a doubt that later you will have an opportunity to more than repay me for any fancied favor that you may think I have conferred. Here!”

He took her card from his pocket and tore it in half so that the edges where he separated it were ragged. Then he gave one of the halves into her hand.

“When you see me to-morrow evening,” he said, “I will hand you my half of this card. You will fit them together and you will know that I am——”

“Who?” she asked, bending forward and smiling into his eyes.

“Felix Parsons,” said Nick.

“You nearly uttered another name, then,” she murmured.

“Yes; later, perhaps I will utter it. Just now it is more for your own sake than for my own that I do not tell it to you. If we should be separated, or if you should be questioned later you will not be forced to deceive; you can truthfully assert that you do not know.”

CHAPTER V.

PLAYING A BOLD GAME.

Count-Raoul de Tierney belonged to that class in Paris which in New York would be called a high roller. He had money to burn and he burned it—at both ends.

Nick Carter knew him, and knew him well; knew his haunts and his habits. Moreover, he liked him, for with all his faults De Tierney was what is called a good fellow.

On the occasion of a former visit to Paris, which the readers of the early numbers of the Nick Carter stories will remember, Nick did the count a very great favor, one which he was not likely to forget, and upon his recollection the detective calculated the success of his plan.

It was after midnight when the detective found him,

deeply absorbed in his cards, for he was a confirmed gambler; but he left the table with very little reluctance when he understood who it was that wanted him, and in a moment more was shaking hands with Nick in the reception room.

Felix Parsons was the name that was written on the card that Nick sent in to him, for it was by that name that the count had known him before.

“De Tierney,” said Nick as soon as they were alone in a private room together, “the time has come when you can repay that obligation about which you had so much to say when I had the good fortune to do you a favor once on a time.”

“Good! Fine! What is it? How much do you want? Everything I’ve got is at your command, Parsons. That was no idle jest when I said I only wanted an opportunity. If it has come, I am glad. What can I do for you?”

“Heavens, how you do go on! I don’t want any money.”

“Don’t you? What then?”

“I want you to go home and remain in the house with your own wife for at least two days—three, if you can do it.”

“Good God, man!”

“Do you think you could make it three?”

“What in the dev——”

“Honestly, De Tierney, that is precisely what I want you to do.”

“I say, look here, Parsons, is this some infernal joke at my expense, or have you been making a bet that you can force me to do something that I have never done before in my life?”

“Neither.”

“Then what——”

“It is simply that I want to borrow your name and reputation for three days, if you will lend them to me.”

“Bosh! I can lend you my name easily enough, but as for reputation I’m rather busted on that proposition.”

“Such as it is it will answer for the purpose,” retorted Nick, coolly.

"Thanks—awfully. Now would you mind telling me exactly what you do want?"

"I want you to get passports for yourself and wife, attended, to go to Russia."

"Well, I say, but you know, old chap, that I haven't the least intention in the world of going to Russia, never, if I can avoid it. Neither has the countess, for that matter."

"Good! I don't want either of you to go there."

"Look here, Parsons, hadn't you better have a racer? You're getting queer in the head."

"No, I'm perfectly sober. I want to use the passports myself."

"The devil you do."

"Exactly. I want to travel under your name; understand?"

"But the countess, old fellow! What has she got to do with it?"

"I'm going to take the countess—that is, a countess with me; or shall I say that she is a princess? Perhaps that would be better."

"Well, I'll be blowed! Who'd have thought that of you! But I say, Parsons, it won't work. It won't work at all!"

"Why won't it?"

"Why, everybody in Paris knows my wife—even the guards at the railway stations. You couldn't fool 'em, not for a holy minute. They'd be on to you in a jiffy and hold you up as sure as shooting."

"Not much they wouldn't."

"Don't you know that our passports to Russia have to contain the photographs of the persons to whom they are issued?"

"Yes."

"Well, there isn't another woman in the world who could pass for my wife, because there isn't another one so beautiful."

"Yes, there is—one."

"Oh, well, her sister, Marie; but she is in Russia."

"Well, then there are two, for the lady who travels with me will pass the guards all right, don't worry about that. Get the passports; I'll attend to the rest.

I can make myself look enough like you to pass. You know that. Will you do it?"

"Of course I'll do it if you are in earnest; but——"

"Never mind the buts. All that I want you to do is to get the passports, and then about midnight to-morrow disappear for a few days, and if you can do it keep your wife out of sight also, until you are sure that I and my companion are well over the border. The fact of the matter, De Tierney, is just this: I was racking my brain as to how I was to get a passport without asking for it, and I never once thought of you until I happened to remember that the companion who goes with me is—well, she looks enough like your wife to be her."

"I didn't know that you ever saw my wife, Parsons."

"Well, I did. Anyhow I saw somebody enough like her so that I know. You get the passports and I will do the rest. Is it a bargain?"

"Sure."

"And you will keep dark three days?"

"Why three? It won't take you all that time to get to Russia."

"I'd ask you for five if I thought it would be of any use, but I know you could not stand it for that length of time. Will you do it?"

"For three, yes; I'll try it."

"Will you attend to it as soon as possible to-morrow?"

"I'll meet you here at three o'clock in the afternoon and have the passports with me."

"Good. While we are here I'll fix myself to look like you. Now one more promise."

"What now?"

"This is to be a dead secret. Not a soul save ourselves is to know anything about it—not even the countess."

"Well, I should say not."

"Besides, you had better remain at home during the three days you are to keep dark. Your wife might see an account in the paper that the Count and Countess de Tierney had started for St. Petersburg, and if she did not know where you were she might think you had

really gone away. Now, I'll play you a game of billiards just to assure you that I haven't forgotten how."

"Done. Come on."

* * * * *

There was not a hitch in the plans of the detective, save one, and that came near to proving a fatal one. It came about through the fondness of the count for having his joke, and also because he was really intensely curious to see the woman who looked sufficiently like his countess to pass for her even to the extent of posing as the original of her photograph.

Therefore, when the train was about on the point of starting, and just as Nick had helped her into the carriage and stepped to one side to speak to the guard, the real count appeared. He had braced himself for the ordeal, which he realized was not exactly the right thing for him to undertake after his promise to his friend, Parsons, and was therefore a little the worse for the wine he had imbibed.

Nick was not aware of his approach until he felt a hand upon his shoulder and heard De Tierney's voice in his ear. And there was only one saving clause to what he had to say; he said it in English instead of in French.

"I say, old chap," he exclaimed, thickly, "I thought I'd just run down to see you off."

Nick turned in amazement, while the guard, perceiving two men who looked as much alike as two peas, and who had never heard before that time that the Count de Tierney had a double, stared at them in round-eyed astonishment.

Nick was angry, but he concealed the fact.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "This is not according to our agreement."

De Tierney bowed forward and whispered:

"I want to see the woman who looks like my wife. I'm bound to see her. There isn't another woman in the world as beautiful as my wife, and I know it. Let me see her, won't you?"

The princess, inside the carriage of the train, could neither hear what was said or see who was there. Indeed, she did not know that a third party had approached at all, and happening at that moment to miss

one of her gloves, which for some purpose she had withdrawn from her hands, she came out upon the platform, and the next instant found herself face to face with her brother-in-law, the count.

Startled almost beyond self-control, she was for a instant incapable of speech or motion, and that instant saved the day, for while she stood staring with icy calmness and with an expression that perfectly counterfeited unrecognition, into the eyes of the real count he uttered a cry of astonishment, then turned and bolted.

In two seconds he had disappeared, and in two more the train started.

Nick Carter and the Princess Stepanislaus were on their way to Russia, but both were greatly perturbed by what had happened. The princess, because she feared that her sister's husband had recognized and would therefore betray her, and Nick because he did not know what the count might do in his condition of half intoxication.

If he had known the truth he would have smiled instead of frowning, for the count, the moment he let them, leaped into his carriage and had himself driven with all haste to his own home, and he was not satisfied until he assured himself that the countess was there. Then he rushed out again and sent a telegram which he addressed to the Count de Tierney, en route, at the German border. It said:

"I was not convinced till I reached home. Don't worry. I will fulfill our agreement;" and Nick laughed when he read it, for he understood that for the moment De Tierney had believed the princess was his own wife.

CHAPTER VI.

OUTWITTING THE THIRD SECTION.

The train upon which Nick Carter and the Princess Marie Theresa were passengers crossed the French frontier in safety and was now rapidly approaching St. Petersburg, where it was due to arrive at half-past six o'clock in the evening.

The several hours which the traveling companion

and passed in each other's society, during which almost every topic under the sun which might be of interest to either of them had been touched upon and discussed, and ripened their somewhat unprecedented acquaintance into a mutual liking and respect.

In short, both felt that they had become very good friends indeed.

Very early in their association the princess discovered something of the sterling character and true manhood of Nick Carter, and decided that she had found one of those rare beings among men, who can be chivalrous, gentle, thoughtful and considerate under even the most trying circumstances; and this, being, as she was, a French woman transplanted to Russian environment, she was not slow to appreciate.

On the other hand, the detective was equally pleased with the princess.

At no time did he seek her confidence concerning the reasons for her extraordinary trip into France, nor did he offer to explain it; but nevertheless he assured himself that whatever her reasons might be, they were adequate and honorable and that sufficed him.

Moreover, he felt that in her he had discovered a friend who might prove of inestimable value in the near future, and he was equally positive that she would not be slow to respond to any demand he might be called upon to make.

And this was something of the feeling that existed between them as they were drawing near to the capital of Russia.

"Princess," he said, smiling at her in order to soften his statement he was about to make, "we have passed the easiest parts of our journey. We are now approaching the danger lines."

"Yes," she replied. "I was thinking of that."

"We cannot leave the train before it draws in at the station at St. Petersburg; that is certain."

"Quite certain; yes."

"And therefore when we do leave it, we must do so without having traveled—that is, as the Count and Countess de Tierney. Therein lies the danger."

"Yes, I have thought of that also."

"We will have to undergo the risk of immediate ar-

rest; and, if that happens, of complete exposure. The consequences of such an ending to our journey will be to you something terrible. We need not mention what they will be, for we both know; and now in the hour that is left to us before we arrive, we must plan so thoroughly that we will be prepared to meet any emergency that may arise."

The princess clasped and unclasped her hands nervously, and her face became a shade paler than usual, but otherwise she was as calm as he was.

"In the short time that we have known each other," she said, "you have taught me to trust you thoroughly. Whatever happens, I will know that you have done the very best that a man could do in my behalf, and now that we are approaching the danger line, as you say, my only desire is that you will tell me what to do, and I will do exactly as you direct."

"Splendid, princess. In that case I think I may assure you that whatever happens you will at least escape with life and liberty."

"And with those at my command, I can, in time, prove the justice of my position. Now, Mr. Parsons, if you will give the orders I will obey them as wholly as I can do so."

Nick was thinking deeply.

"There may be no danger at all," he said. "If De Tierney has kept faith with me in the matter of the three days under cover—and after the receipt of his telegram I rather believe that he will do so—we will have yet a few hours after our arrival before the Russian officials can by any possibility discover that the Count and Countess de Tierney have not left Paris. In other words, madam, we must, during those few hours, play our parts boldly and fearlessly—and that, as you know, means much."

"Yes, I understand."

"It means, madam, that in the city of your home, where everybody, even to the ordinary pedestrians and drivers of the streets, knows you by sight at least, you must pass as another. It means that you must be prepared, if it should be necessary, to meet face to face with your own husband, and still play the part of your sister, and do it so well that he will not suspect

you. It means, in short, nerve, bravery, coolness, decision, defiance—everything.”

“Yes, yes, I understand.”

“I know an excellent hotel in the city where I have stopped on other occasions. It is kept by an Irishman who changed O'Malley into Malet in order to make people think he is a Frenchman. We will go there.”

“Yes.”

“Understand, I am arranging now so that we will know just what to do if everything goes smoothly. You know, of course, that in order to carry out the deception in the parts we play, I purchased a considerable outfit of trunks and baggage in Paris and had them marked with the names of the count and countess. In one of those trunks, which I will have sent to the rooms immediately, I have everything I need for the work of disguising you as well as myself. That trunk I intend to be opened and examined at the frontier, so that it has the government seal and will be sent at once to the rooms in the hotel. The others will wait at the station till I go there for their examination; and they will wait a long time, I'm thinking.”

“Now, madam, this is the plan: As soon as we arrive at the hotel I will take such things as are necessary for the disguise. I will order a box at the theater and we will drive in a closed carriage to the playhouse; that is, we will start, but we will not arrive. I will first have directed you how to dress so that you can pass from the hotel to the carriage without fear of discovery. In fact, I have wired Malet to meet the count and countess at the station, but in such a way that he will know who the wire is from. He is thoroughly trustworthy and will do everything that I will not have time to do. When we enter the carriage you will be driven at once to some place where another conveyance will be in waiting, and that one will take you at once to your home, which you say is two leagues out of the city. It will not take me three minutes to make those arrangements after I have seen Malet. I know that once you are put down in the vicinity of your own home you will be no longer in any danger of being discovered.”

“No. More dangerous. It is all arranged in case, but it is as difficult and as dangerous. But sup-

pose these plans do not have a chance to work? Suppose we are arrested at the station?”

“In that case there is only one thing to do.”

“And that is?”

“Keep cool. Insist that you are the countess; that there has been a terrible mistake at the other end. Keep your dignity. Do not manifest any fright, and leave the rest to Malet.”

“Who is this Malet? I have heard the name before.”

“Malet is a man whose power in Russia is second only to your husband's; in some respects it is even greater. He is my friend. I placed him where he is. He is resourceful. He will not fail us when he knows what I wish him to do.”

It was exactly half-past six when the train rolled in at the station. For it to be on time was a circumstance that was almost unprecedented—and very happily so at the sequel proved.

Scarcely had the long line of cars come to a stop when the door of the compartment occupied by Nick and the princess was thrown open and a huge figure, which Nick instantly recognized as belonging to Malet, made its appearance.

“The Count de Tierney?” he said, speaking rapidly and in French. “This way please. The grand duke is awaiting you. I will attend to your baggage. This way, please! This way!”

Then, leaning forward into the compartment and lowering his voice so that it could not penetrate to the outside, he added, in English:

“For God's sake, Nick, hurry. There isn't a moment to lose. Even now we may be too late, but it is worth trying.”

With one sweep of his great arm he gathered the small baggage into a heap and hurried with it across the station platform.

Nick and the princess leaped down and followed him without an instant's delay, so that almost as soon as the wheels of the train that had brought them there had ceased to revolve they were inside Malet's carriage, which was being driven rapidly away, while on the main line outside, looming like a giant in the distance, a Malet.

"You should thank your stars, Nick, that the train is on time," he said, coolly. "It is the first occasion since my recollection that it has been so. Even now, when we are not two minutes away from the station, I'd be willing to bet a hundred pounds that Stevanislaus' men are there looking for you, and the guard is telling me that you were whisked off instantly to the grand duke, who awaits you. That was a good lie of mine, but it did the business."

"So our arrest was ordered, was it?"

"Sure. Not an hour ago. But the devils will have a hard time of their lives finding you."

"How did you do it?"

"Didn't you see? Sure I thought you were there. I did it as I do everything else without waiting for my say by your leave, damn your eyes, or what's the matter?"

"And now they will be after you."

"Not a bit of it. Don't you worry. That guard is one of my men. He never saw you after he opened the door. We weren't in this wagon before he had smashed the lock of the compartment door, and he is supposed to swear that he found it that way. Don't you see, old chap? You were out of the train, and I, God knows where, before he approached the door to open it. Faith, he couldn't swear if it was a man or a monkey in that compartment when they questioned him, and sure he's been in the service there these twenty years, so they'll believe him."

"Where are you taking us now?" asked Nick.

"To the grand duke, sure," and Malet grinned. "No more."

"It sounds well, Charley, but it spots when you look at it."

"To his house, then. Sure it's the same thing, isn't it? He's not there, more power to him. You and the lady will rest easy there for a day or two until you have had a chance to catch your breath."

"And that day or two will be utterly fatal to me," said the princess.

"Sure, madam, then you couldn't wait. If you want to look there where they are said to have the small-

pox, faith, I'll have ye whisked out there this very night, and you can sleep in your own bed."

"How do you know who I am?" she asked, amazed, for her face was hidden behind a heavy veil so that her features were utterly undiscernible.

"By two things, madam. By your voice if nothing else, but also by the fact that you and your sister, the countess, being the two most beautiful women in Europe, sure you'd have to be one or the other of them to be traveling along with Nick under the name of either one. And I have good reason to know that it wouldn't be the countess who is with him."

"Why would it not be the countess?" she asked, bending forward, somewhat eagerly.

"Well, madam, if you don't mind I'd rather not answer that question."

"Very well. You have promised to get me to—to my home this very night."

"I have, and I'll do it."

"Thank you. Will you tell me how soon we will start?"

"Within an hour. Here we are at the house of the grand duke now. It isn't the one he receives his guests in, which is all the better for our purposes. And now, madam, if Nick here will pardon me, I have a word to say to you before we start for your home."

"What is it, Mr. Malet?"

"This: Maybe I'm not such a fool as I look, and again maybe I am. Maybe I know that you are the princess and maybe I'm not sure that you are not the countess, after all. Don't mind that. You are with my friend, here, and if you are his friend you are mine. That settles that part of it. I just want you to promise both of us that Prince Ivan is made no wiser about the events of this night. That's all. No, one more word. Here we are at the grand duke's house. I'll take you inside and it will be an hour before I come back after you. Maybe you don't know that you have been traveling with Nick Carter and maybe you do, but whether you do or not, let me advise that if you

have left anything unsaid which you ought to say to him, get it out within the next hour if you value his friendship—and mine."

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT UNDER THE GROUND.

They entered through a door which communicated with the grounds at the rear of the residence, and to which Malet carried a key, and soon were within the house.

Not a soul appeared to bar their progress, and it seemed indeed as if the house were deserted.

Even to Nick, it seemed strange that Malet should have conducted them to one of the many residences of the man who stood as near to the throne of Russia as the grand duke, but there are wheels within wheels in that remarkable country that are beyond the understanding of any person who is not familiar with them. This much the detective did know: That Charles Malet was deep in the confidence of the powers that rule over all the Russias, and it therefore did not astonish him that the man should possess a private key to an entrance where the grand duke no doubt had frequent occasion to admit persons for personal and private interviews.

Malet did not wait after he had conducted them to a reception room of the house.

"Here you can wait in peace," he said, "and you need have no fears of interruption. I happen to know that we are the only persons in the house at present. I have only one caution to give you, and that is that you do not strike a light. Sit here in the light that shines in from the street, until I return. Then, Nick, we will send the madam away to the Stevanislaus palace, and after that we will decide what to do ourselves. Wait, now, for sure I won't be long."

As soon as Malet had gone the princess turned to Nick.

"You are no doubt wondering what your friend meant by his remarks to me while we were in the carriage," she said, tentatively.

"Not especially," replied Nick. "It is evident to me

that he does not believe that you are the princess and that he does suspect that you are the countess. But what of that? It makes no difference to me who you are. It is enough that you are—or, rather, were, a woman in distress, and that it was my good fortune to be of assistance. Nor are you to forget that you were also of assistance to me. I had never seen either the princess or the countess when I met you, so it is natural that I should accept either identity as the true one which you cared to give me."

"I wish you still to think of me as the princess," she said.

"Very well; I will do so."

"No matter what you hear to the contrary, I would like to know that you believe me," she repeated.

"If you assure me that it is so, I certainly will believe you until I have very good reason not to do so."

"Thank you. I do so assure you. And you are Nick Carter?"

"Yes."

"I might have guessed that much had I not been occupied with my own affairs."

"You have heard my name before now, then?"

"I have indeed."

She leaned forward in her chair until she almost touched him, and her lips were parted to speak, when they were both startled by a loud knocking against the panels of the door by which they had entered the room.

With a quick warning to the princess to be silent, Nick leaped across the room to the door and silently turned the key. Then, without replying to the summons upon it, he bent his ear to the casing and listened.

He could distinguish voices whispering together, and he judged that there were three of them; but it was impossible to determine what they were saying, or that he knew that their conversation was in the Russian language.

Presently, after they had exchanged ideas, the conversation was repeated, louder than before, and following it a rough voice demanded, in Russian:

"Open, in the name of the Czar!"

Nick did not reply.

A third time the knocking sounded against the door, and again the voice demanded in the same words that it be opened, but this time, with the added assurance that if the command was not instantly obeyed, the door would be burst from its hinges.

The door was a solid one, and Nick knew that it could resist attacks upon it for a considerable time, and that time, whatever it might be, he was resolved to improve to the utmost.

Still in silence he recrossed to the side of the princess, and taking her by the hand, led her quickly to the opposite end of the room where he had noticed a second door. Where it might lead them he had no idea, but was certain that as yet it had not been approached from the other side.

Like the first, it was unlocked, but as they passed through, Nick removed the key and then when they had passed out, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

In this second room they were in black darkness, but the small pocket electric flashlight which he always carried with him, quickly revealed the fact that they were in a square, unfurnished room that seemed to have no exit.

I say seemed to have none, but Nick felt certain that there must be one; and as there were no signs of such a place in the walls, he inspected the floor.

A square of old netting half covered the floor. It looked as if it had been thrown there negligently and for no especial reason, but when Nick pulled it aside he discovered a well-defined trapdoor in the floor beneath it.

He could hear the noise made by the men who were knocking the door of the room they had so lately vacated, and he knew that it would not be long before they would break it down, after which doubtless they would attack the one he had just locked.

Plainly there was no time to lose.

There was a ring in the trapdoor, and this he seized, pulling, with a smile of pleasure, that the door raised itself from its place, as if its action were assisted by magic.

"Come, princess," he said, quickly. "I have no idea where these stairs will lead us, but it is certain that

they will take us somewhere, and any place is healthier than this one just at present."

He threw his light upon the stairs and bade her descend before him. Then, seizing the matting and holding it so that he could direct the manner of its falling into place, he followed her and lowered the door after him.

They found themselves in a narrow corridor, which, as nearly as Nick could determine, led toward the yard through which they had entered the house.

Indeed, before they had traveled far, it terminated, and before them was a circular flight of half a dozen long steps, arranged spirally, and which ascended vertically to a manhole above them.

"Wait a moment," said Nick. "Without doubt that opens into the yard not far from the place where we entered it. Before we make our presence known it will be well to discover if there is anybody awaiting us outside."

He climbed the stairs and raised the iron covering of the manhole—cautiously, and taking care to move it only sufficiently to permit him to see into the yard.

But even as he did so, it was seized roughly from the outside and jerked from his grasp, and in the brief glance that was afforded him he could see half a dozen forms above him in the yard.

At the same instant the princess screamed aloud.

"Help! help!" she cried, and he knew by the sound of her voice that a hand had been thrust rudely over her mouth before she had fully given utterance to the last word.

Instantly he released his hold upon the iron and dropped back into the passageway, for he realized that their pursuers had somehow stolen a march on them, and had followed them through the trapdoor, much more quickly than he had believed they could do it.

When he released his hold upon the covering of the manhole and threw himself downward and somewhat to one side in order to escape the spiral stairway, he fell fairly upon the head and shoulders of a man who was beneath him, and so that his hand clutched the thick hair of the man's head.

It was no time to stop for introduction, and while

his left hand rested upon the thick skull of the man beneath him his right one descended in a blow that caught its victim exactly upon the temple.

As they fell to the bottom of the passageway together, it seemed to Nick as if he were seized by a dozen pairs of hands.

He was sure that two men at least threw themselves upon him, but two ordinary men in the hands of Nick Carter were as two babes in the grasp of a full grown boy.

One of them received a blow in the stomach which doubled him up like a jackknife, and the other found his throat caught in a viselike grip from which there was no escaping.

But the grip was only a preparatory measure.

Almost instantly the face above it received a stunning blow between the eyes, which effectually robbed him of his senses, and he slumped away from the grasp of the detective like a wet dish rag dropped from a woman's hand.

In the meantime the men in the yard above had not been idle.

One of them had descended the stairs and had already reached the bottom; two others were on their way down, and Nick had no doubt that there were still others in the passageway behind him.

But his blood was thoroughly up now.

He had not tasted the delights of a regular set-to fight, where all his great powers and strength were necessarily brought into play, in a long time, but now he had it ready at his hands.

Already there were three of his assailants laid out and ready for repairs, and he was determined that there would be many more of them before they captured and walked off with Nick Carter.

The first man down the spiral stairs touched the bottom just as Nick turned to face him, and he never knew what hit him until he was told about it afterward, if he ever was told.

He received the blow in the region of the solar plexus and the grunt he gave was like the cry of a beast in pain.

The man who followed him had his legs pulled from

under him, and as he fell he received a blow on the point of his chin which broke his jaw and sent him on a gallop to dreamland.

The third received identically the same treatment, and then Nick had an opportunity to draw his weapon.

"The first man who shows his head in that opening gets a bullet in his brain," he cried, in Russian. "Stand back, all of you, unless you look for death!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN NICK CARTER'S BLOOD IS UP.

Like all iron coverings for manholes, this one was provided with a chain by which it could be fastened from below.

It dangled in plain sight before the eyes of the detective, and he seized upon it and pulled.

The iron cover flew back into place upon the instant, and it was the work of only half a moment to fasten it to the staple in the wall so that the cover could not be again lifted from the outside.

One of the men whom Nick had silenced was endeavoring to raise himself from the ground, and the detective gave him a second rap on the head with his fist to quiet him, and then, flashing his light for an instant upon the others to see that they would not oppose him, he left them to recover as they might, and sped along the narrow passage toward the room from which he had made his escape with the princess.

His entire idea and energies were now centered upon rescuing her.

He realized that she had been seized by one, or possibly two of the men who had followed them, and that she had been dragged back into the house, where he had no doubt her captors would await the coming of their friends with him as their prisoner. He knew that it would never occur to them that one man, taken at the disadvantage that he was subjected to, would be able to outdo them all, escape and return to rescue the prisoner they had taken.

"I'll find them there, waiting," he said to himself grimly, as he made his way along the passage, "and if I

"There are a dozen of them I'll let them feel the weight of my hand."

When he arrived at the trapdoor it was open, and he could hear voices in Russian proceeding from the room where he and the princess had been waiting for Malet to return.

"They must have had a key to that door," he thought, "else they could not have passed through it so quickly after they broke down the other one."

Cautiously he climbed the short flight of stairs.

The little square unfurnished room was vacant. The man from whom the voices proceeded were in the room beyond, as he had supposed.

In a moment he was at the door which connected the two rooms wherein the occupants had not hesitated to take a light, and he started back in something akin to dismay when he discovered who the occupants were.

The princess was seated in the same chair she had occupied when she and Nick had been in the room together awaiting the coming of Malet, and in front of her, with his hands clasped together behind his back, looking down upon her with a sneering frown upon his face, and a cruel smile distorting his handsome mouth, was no less a personage than the grand duke himself.

"We will find a way to prove whether you are speaking the truth or not," he was saying, evidently in continuance of their conversation, which the detective had overheard.

"Your highness finds ways to do many things which are beneath the dignity of a gentleman and an heir presumptive to the throne of Russia," she retorted.

"By Heaven, madam!" he exclaimed, wrathfully, "you will do well to curb your tongue when you address me."

"And you, sir, would do well to curb yours, whenever you have occasion to address a woman who listens to me from necessity rather than choice."

"Bah! Again! Are you not really the Countess de Tierney?"

"No. I am a subject of the Czar—the Princess Countess."

"Then what were you doing out of Russia without permission? And how comes it that you return here

in the name of your sister, and with a passport that was issued to her?"

"I will not answer those questions, sir."

"Then, by Heaven! I will find a way to make you answer."

"How, sir?"

"Oh, there are methods and you shall have a taste of them. The torture chamber is resorted to at times, even in this century. We will try what a little pressure on your thumbs will do to wring the truth from your lips. I have a pair here that are wonderfully efficacious."

"You would dare to torture me?" she exclaimed, in alarm.

"Torture you? Why not, pray?"

"You would not dare!"

"Wouldn't I? Who will know it, pray? Your husband? Bah! If you are, as I believe you to be, the Countess de Tierney, he will smile and rub his hands and be glad. If you are, as you insist, the princess, his wife, he will never know, for unless you tell me the truth and the whole truth, what took you out of Russia, what you did while you were gone, why you returned here as the countess, and what devilish plot you are mixed up with—unless you do all this, I say, he will never know that you are tortured. He will never know that you have returned to Russia at all, for you will have disappeared off the face of the earth, where even the chief of the Third Section cannot find you."

She shuddered, and he waited a moment in order that his words should have full effect.

"You will be submitted to the torture first," he continued, coldly, "until you have told all you know, and then—then—then you shall start on the road to the mines of Siberia. Countess or not, you shall go to Siberia in the name of the countess. I would gladly send her there if I could get my hands upon her, and if you are not she, which I do not believe, by Heaven! you shall go there in her place unless——"

"Unless what, sir?"

"Unless you reveal enough to betray her into my hands."

"Does your highness expect me to show myself a weakling?"

"No, for I know you to be the countess. The princess would never dare to defy me."

"Princess or countess, you shall not make me fear you," she retorted.

"You devil! you beautiful devil!" he said, admiration shining out of his eyes hideously, now that she was so utterly in his power.

She smiled scornfully up at him, and he bent lower over her and almost whispered, although his words were plainly audible to Nick.

"You know how to save yourself," he said, tensely.

"Ay, I know," she replied, with subdued and quiet rage, "but rather your Siberia and your miners and convict scourgers, than you—than you!"

The grand duke threw back his head and laughed aloud, and Nick, watching through the door, saw the princess bite her lips in anger, as if she had unwittingly betrayed herself.

"You know, do you?" cried the grand duke, exultingly. "You know, do you? Then by all the gods, I know, too! You are the countess, or you would not know. I have you now, madam, for the princess would not have known. But you know! Ah, yes, you know! Good! Good! Now, my pretty countess, will you save yourself? You know so well how to do it, and you can do it if you will. Will you save yourself?"

For one instant she turned her eyes away from him and they traveled to the doorway where Nick was standing, and she saw him.

If she had hesitated for a brief instant all her hesitation vanished when she discovered her protector so near, and evidently prepared to leap into the room to her defense. She turned her eyes back again to the grand duke.

"No," she said to him, coldly. "I defy you."

Again he laughed aloud.

"Yes, yes," he said, still laughing, "you were never so beautiful as you are now. I will find a way to tame you, and it shall not be in this same chamber, either. Who was the man who traveled with you?"

"I will not tell you."

"No? Oh, well, we will let that pass. There are other ways of finding out who he is."

Then it was that Nick stepped boldly into the room, closing and locking the door behind him. And the grand duke did not hear him until he spoke.

"To be sure there are other ways," he said, quietly. "One of them would be to ask him."

The grand duke wheeled like lightning, and he took one quick step toward Nick; but there he halted, for he found that he was gazing directly into the muzzle of a revolver which, if discharged, would send a bullet speeding into his brain directly between his eyes.

"I am the man who accompanied the princess to Russia," said Nick, coldly, "and before we indulge in further conversation, let me warn you that you will never in your life so near to death as you are at the moment, you brute!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE DASH FOR FREEDOM.

No person, so far as I know, has ever accused the grand duke of cowardice. Indeed, he has the reputation of fearlessness. Moreover, in physique he is much like his giant brother, the father of the present emperor, and is possessed of prodigious strength.

Nevertheless, when he looked into the eyes of Nick Carter and listened to the quiet tone of the voice that warned him, he realized that this stranger who had intruded upon his interview with madame, meant what he said and that his life was therefore really in danger.

Therefore, he temporized; but there was a cold, cynical smile upon his countenance, even as he did so, for he believed he knew that assistance would come within a very few moments and that then the tide would be turned.

"Who are you and why do you masquerade as the woman's husband?" he demanded.

"Let it suffice," replied Nick, coolly, "that I am neither a Russian nor a Frenchman, and that at the present moment I am here as the champion of the woman whom you have dared to threaten. Doubtless your men who now lie senseless in the passageway

in here and the yard might give you a good account of me if they chose to do so. But I haven't time to waste words with you, sir. I have orders to give, for the first time in your life, doubtless, there are orders for you to obey."

"You dare?"

"I am no respecter of personages. Your rank has no effect upon me. I would as soon put a bullet through your brain as to strike with a whip the meanest scoundrel that runs the streets of St. Petersburg. Oh, it will do you no good to foam and writhe, for I mean what I say, and moreover, there is no time to spare. You would spare your own life, seat yourself in that chair that is behind you."

"It has been said that the grand duke was no coward—that he possessed great strength. It must also be remembered that there were weighty reasons why the detective would rather resort to any expedient in reaction than to shoot the man who stood facing him. To shoot or even seriously to wound the heir presumptive to the throne of Russia, was a thing not to be done lightly, and nobody was better aware of this fact than the grand duke himself."

"He was also a rapid thinker as well as gifted with unusual quickness of action, and in the moment that passed while Nick was talking he determined to risk the threats of his enemy in one great effort to secure a better result."

"Then it was that Nick's wonderful marksmanship with a revolver was suddenly demonstrated. Readers of Nick Carter's adventures will remember some of his remarkable feats in that respect, and one occasion in particular when to decide a wager and prevent an unnecessary duel, he hurled a cocked revolver into the air, and while it was circling above him, fired with a deadly weapon and so accurately that the bullet struck the trigger of the flying weapon and discharged it. The feat is called to that feat in order to account for the opening at this critical moment."

"The grand duke, positive in his own mind that the man who defied him would not dare to kill him, instead of seating himself in the chair as he was commanded to do, half turned as if to comply with the

direction, and then leaped directly at Nick Carter's throat."

But if he had calculated correctly that the detective would not actually take his life, he had not figured upon the narrow margin between it and death where Nick would pause."

As he launched himself forward, Nick fired, seemingly point blank, at the grand duke's head, and that royal personage, instead of seizing upon the detective as he had intended to do, clasped one hand against his head, staggered forward a pace or two, and then fell to the floor with a crash almost upon the spot where Nick had stood an instant before."

And when he fell, he laid there motionless and senseless."

The princess, for until we know better we must continue to call her such, leaped forward with a cry of terror."

"You have killed him! You have killed him!" she breathed, hoarsely. "My God, what have you done? There is no country on the globe that can protect us now."

"Hush!" commanded Nick. "I have not killed him. He is barely hurt at all. To-morrow he will put a plaster over the scratch-wound above his temple and in a day he will have forgotten it, save when he looks in his mirror. He is stunned, that is all; and we, if we would make our escape from this place, have no time to lose."

"Yes. Let us fly."

"Hark. The men have already arrived at the trap-door—some of them. They don't know what they are up against, particularly since they heard that pistol shot, and they won't hurry. We will have time. Come."

He seized her by one hand and led her out through the door that had been battered down by their assailants."

From there to the yard was an easy stage of their flight, and when they emerged into it, and were making their way across it toward the gate, the little door in the wall was thrown open and Malet appeared."

"This way," he commanded, coolly. "I have been

waiting for some time. It was up to you, Nick, to get out of the house. There are reasons why I could not go in there to your assistance, but now that you are here, why, the thing is dead easy."

"Did you hurt him much?" he asked, as soon as they were in the carriage and the three horses that drew it had been whipped into a run.

"No," replied Nick. "He will be all right in half an hour." He did not offer further explanations and they drove on in silence.

Presently Malet spoke again.

"Has madam explained her position to you?" he asked.

"No," replied the woman, speaking before Nick could answer.

"Then do it now," said Malet, coldly.

"I have deceived you, Mr. Carter," she said, simply, turning toward him. "I have willfully deceived you. I am not the princess. I am not Marie Theresa, but Yvonne, her sister. I am the Countess de Tierney. Formerly I lived here in Russia with my sister, but I was expelled and compelled to live out of the country. I have been forbidden to communicate with my sister, or she with me. I have been accused of complicity with nihilists, and twice it has been proved to the satisfaction of Russian officials that I have conspired against the life of the czar. I have been warned that if I returned here, I would be sent to the mines—the most hopeless place in all Siberia. I have been persecuted by emissaries of Russia, even in my own home, until life became unbearable. Is it necessary for me to say that I am utterly innocent of every charge against me? After what you have seen and heard this night, can you not understand that all this has been done because of the persecutions of the man from whom you have just rescued me? You know Russia; can you not understand all that it is impossible for me to explain in words?"

"I know that the countess is innocent," said Malet, coldly.

"Thank you, sir," was Yvonne's comment. Then to Nick, again: "A word or two more will explain what remains. I took the flying trip to Marseilles and return

in order to receive a message from my sister. It was arranged that I was to receive and send the messages as I did in order to avoid discovery. She is in great trouble; she needs me and I came. There is no small post at her house, although even Mr. Malet believes my report to be true."

"But how, under the circumstances did you dare travel into Russia under your own name, knowing that you would be arrested the moment you arrived?" asked Nick.

"Call it impulse, if you will; it is nothing else. I knew that I could not enter the country in my sister's name, for it was known that she had not left it. It was very daring of proceeding under my own name toward off detaining hands until my arrival in St. Petersburg, and after that—well, I trusted to you and to your sagacity; and I was right in doing so, for you have saved me."

"And what do you wish to do next?"

"All I ask is that Mr. Malet will keep his word and have me conveyed to the residence of my sister."

"Which," said Malet, quietly but firmly, "he will do under no considerations consent to do."

She turned to him in affright.

"You will not?" she asked. "What, then, is to come of me?"

"Heaven only knows, madam. I can hide you somewhere in the city for an indefinite time, and later, as this breeze has blown itself out, I can probably smuggle you out of the country. That is the best I can do; the best I will do."

"Wait," said Nick. "I want to ask a few questions. Countess, did your husband recognize you at the station before we left Paris?"

"He thought he did, but he was not certain until arrived at our home."

"And then?"

"He found a letter of explanation that I had sent him during the day."

"Is he in sympathy with your actions in this matter?"

"No; but he loves me. He would not have consented to my coming to my sister, but, having thrust

the bear's embrace, as he would call it, he trusts perfectly. His telegram to you proved to me that trusts you also, and that, sir, explains my more than natural confidence in you, under the circumstances."

"I see. I understand. Malet, slow up the pace of the horses. We are going too fast. Now tell me the time it is."

"Half-past nine. Three hours since you arrived in Petersburg. Things have moved a bit swift since, eh?"

"Rather. Where is the czar at this hour?"

"In his private study, most likely, reading Shake-speare, or Milton, or Emerson, or Thoreau, or Huxley. God knows; I don't; for it's just as likely that he is picking a new tune out of his mandolin."

"You have great privileges with him, Malet, and you have access to him at all hours. That I know."

"Well, what of it? As chief of his secret, personal staff, of course I have; but that does not mean that I can take others to him."

"Oh, yes, it does, Malet—in this particular case."

"What do you want me to do?"

"This: You have a method of getting into his presence without the knowledge of others. At least you can get to his father. Have you that now?"

"Yes."

"I know the way. You took me there once before, to his father. Do you remember?"

"Of course, I remember."

"Is the way the same, and does he sit in the same room, evenings, that his father formerly used?"

"Yes."

"Good! Then take us to the little house outside the palace walls. You need go no farther than the inside of that house. I will do the rest."

"And have me shipped off to Siberia to-morrow."

"Not at all. I can prove to the czar that his father told me; that the way through the little house was told to me. Your name will not be mentioned. He will not know that I have seen you. Listen, Malet; I would ask this favor of you in any case, for I am on a special mission to the czar, and I bring papers

from the Emperor of Japan which must be delivered to him in person. Look!"

Nick loosened his waistcoat and ripped open the lining. Then he produced a packet that was wrapped in oiled silk, which bore the arms of the mikado and which was addressed in plain script to the czar.

"That is the excuse for my coming," said Nick. "He will ask for no other when he has read the contents of this packet. He does not desire war; this he prays for peace. He will write his reply with his own hand. By midnight, or one o'clock, I will be through with him, and we will rejoice in the little house."

"We! Who do you mean by we?"

"The countess and myself."

"Do you mean that you intend to take her to the presence of the czar with you?"

"Certainly. He shall know from her own lips what she has been made to suffer by his uncle, whom he does not love any too well. He shall know from me, part of what I have seen and heard this night, in corroboration of it all. For once he shall hear the truth, and he shall give the countess and me safe conduct to the borders of Russia, under his own name and signature. For a while, Malet, he shall be Czar of all the Russians, in fact as well as in name, and Nick Carter will show him how it can be done. Weakling though he is, for a little space I will transform him into the strong, assertive man he should be. Drive to your house first, while I make myself Nick Carter again, and then, Malet, to the little house outside the palace walls."

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER DEFIES THE CZAR.

Nicholas, Czar of all the Russias, was alone in his private library.

Hundreds of men were on the alert, guarding him, and between his person and any known means of access to his presence, an individual in attempting to approach would have had to pass scores of faithful attendants and to reply to hundreds of questions satisfactorily.

Nevertheless, there was a secret way; one that had

been designed by Alexander, his father, and it was the way through the little house outside the palace walls.

It was the favorite room of the czar. No one could disturb him there, and whenever he occupied it, none dared to disturb him unless he called. His one solace in the trying position he filled, was and is to retire to that room.

At half-past ten o'clock he was reading when one of the paintings, in its massive frame against the wall, swung outward as on hinges, and Nick Carter, followed by the Countess de Tierney, stepped silently into the room.

So absorbed was the emperor in his reading that he heard no sound until the detective spoke to him softly, but then he leaped to his feet with a low cry of alarm, and reached for the bell rope that hung just above the library table; but he arrested his hand when it was halfway to the rope, for he remembered the face of the man who spoke to him, and he recalled the incident that Nick mentioned.

"Your majesty," said Nick, "I am the Nick Carter who was once presented to you in this same room by your august father. Your majesty will remember me?"

He spoke so softly and smiled so reassuringly that the czar's fears were disarmed. Moreover, he did remember.

"Did Malet bring you here?" demanded the emperor, frowning.

"I have come alone, sir, save for the presence of this lady, who will presently explain why she is here."

"The Princess Stevanislaus!" murmured the czar, believing that he recognized her; and Nick, for reasons of his own, did not correct the error.

"I have come," continued Nick, "as a special envoy and private messenger from the Emperor of Japan; and I have brought this for your personal perusal."

He stepped forward and laid the packet on the table before the czar, then resumed his position at a respectful distance.

For a moment the czar seemed dazed, and his eyes roamed from Nick to the countess, then toward the door through which he could summon assistance, then

back again to Nick; and then he took the packet in hand and broke the seal.

Immediately he became absorbed in its contents, livid to all else, for the Czar of Russia is a kindly and a man of peace, no matter what is said of him to the contrary; and the document before him prayed for peace—honorable peace. It prayed that he might use his influence with his council to that end; it besought him to avoid the clash of arms and the wanton sacrifice of life which would result; it begged him, in short, to do exactly what he most desired to do, but which he well knew that it might be impossible for him to accomplish.

When he had finished reading it, he stood for a time lost in thought; but presently he raised his eyes.

"I remember you now, perfectly," he said in a low tone. "You are the Nick Carter who once served my father so greatly and so well; and now you have done great danger to place this message in my hands. I have done well. I thank you."

Nick acknowledged the words with a bow.

"Who, beside ourselves, is aware of your business in this country?" he asked.

"Nobody, your majesty, save those whom it directly concerns—and Malet."

"Your attempt has been a daring one, Mr. Carter, but," he added, sadly, "it has also been a fruitless one. Return to the Emperor of Japan and say to him that I can do nothing. Tell him that my feelings are the same as his, but that I cannot interfere—not to the extent that he can do so in his own country, and he is helpless in the hands of his ministers. I regret it, but I can do nothing."

"The mikado would be honored if your majesty would consent to write his reply—even as the mikado wrote his message—with your own hand."

"I will do so. Wait."

He seated himself at the table and wrote rapidly for many minutes, and during that time Nick and the countess remained standing. When he had finished, he folded the letter and put it inside the same oiled envelope in which the other message had been delivered to him.

"I would place my seal upon it if I had some wax," he said, then, plaintively; and Nick stepped quickly forward.

"I anticipated such a wish, your majesty," he said, and I have brought some with me."

The silk envelope was soon sealed, the old address pressed out and a new one added, and then it was returned to Nick.

"That ends our interview," said the czar then, briefly.

"Not quite, sir," replied Nick. "There is one thing more. Madam, who accompanies me, has something she desires to say to your majesty."

"Well, what is it?" and the czar turned petulantly toward her.

"I will speak for her, if your majesty will permit," proposed Nick. "She is not the Princess Stevanis, as your majesty supposes, but is the princess's sister, the Countess Yvonne de Tierney."

"Ah!"

The emperor turned sharply and reached for the bell again, and his hand was almost upon it, when Nick, unmindful of the sacred personage he was dealing, seized his wrist and prevented his giving the

"Your majesty will pardon me," he said, as the emperor fell back a step or two in abject terror. "You must pardon me; and also her. She is not here to do you injury; she has never sought to do so. *You have been misinformed. She is no more in league with me than I am—than you are, yourself. For every wrong lie that has been told to you concerning her, she is responsible. Now, sir, listen to her own story, and for once in your life know the truth and content to do your duty."

"How dare you speak to me so, sir?" demanded the emperor, frightened, but angry.

"I dare anything, your majesty, in the cause of a wronged and persecuted woman."

"So I perceive."

"Hear her story. Listen to it to the end. Remember that I came here with the message you have just received, which I procured by force. The

countess came with me, her one desire being to see her sister, the princess. Now, she is willing to return to her home and her husband, without accomplishing that purpose. She has been with me every moment since she arrived, and her demand—nay, my demand——"

"Your demand? To me?"

"Yes, your majesty, my demand, if you will have it so, is that you give to us your personal signature and assurance that we shall be permitted to return in safety across the borders of Russia."

"For yourself, yes. For her, no," replied the czar, sternly.

"For both, sir. You must. Hear her story."

"I do not need to hear it, for I will not believe it," he said, crossly.

"Then hear me!"

Nick took a step nearer to him, and, raising one arm, pointed to the aperture through which they had entered the room.

"Yonder, sir, is the door by which I came here. There is a train which leaves for the border in one hour. If you do not grant what I request, I swear to you that I will bind you, and I will take you out of the palace by that secret way; that I will convey you to a hiding place where no one can find you, and that I will keep you there until you do consent. I can do it and I will do it. Write out your own royal will that we two shall proceed together across the border, and that a special guard be placed at our disposal until we are in safety, or take the consequences. An emperor can be kidnaped from his own cabinet, and by Heaven, sir, unless you agree to what I demand, the whole world shall be made to ring with the story of your mysterious disappearance."

"Give me the paper. I will write," said the czar, shuddering.

Nick placed the material before him, and watched while he wrote his message. And when it was completed, he said:

"And now, sir, the private royal seal. You have it on your watch chain. You know now why I permitted myself to speak thus. Thank you, sir. For once, you

have done an act of rare justice. We will go now, the way we came; but first, there is one more word."

"Another threat?"

"No, sir; a word of advice. I know that you will not seek to hinder our flight, now that your sacred person is once more safe and that we are on our way, because you will not wish it to be known that an American has dared to defy you and to force you to do his will. But there is something that you may do to speed our departure, and to explain to the curious how we happen to possess your private seal as our safeguard."

"What may that be?"

"When we have gone—after we shall have been gone a quarter of an hour, call in the captain of your guard. Tell him that you have caused to be sent to me by your secretary, this royal pass across the border. Tell him that you fear that the pass may be questioned at the station, and that he is to go there and see to it that it is properly recognized. Give him orders, too, to convey to the officials of the railroad which will avoid interruptions for us until we shall have crossed the border. Good-night, sir. If I ever enter your presence again I hope it will be for the purpose of serving you—and for anything unkind that I have had occasion to say, I beg your majesty's pardon. Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Mr. Carter. You make me like and trust you, in spite of all. As for the countess, I will try to believe that she has not sought my life. Bear my respects to the Emperor of Japan, and try to remember that your interview to-night has been, not with Nicholas, the czar, but with Nicholas, the man."

"Then," said Nick, impulsively stepping forward and extending his hand, "shake hands with me and let us part as men."

The czar rose from his chair, smiling and extending his own hand.

"I wish," he said, wearily, "that I were going away in your place and you were remaining here in mine. Somehow I feel that you would be better able to cope with the difficulties that I am compelled to face."

He half turned and pointed toward the bookcase.

"That," he said, "is why I read so many books; cause in reading them, I can forget that I am an emperor and imagine that I am only a man after all. It is God's blessing to be merely a man; His curse to a czar. Good-night."

* * * * *

At half-past seven o'clock the following evening grand duke sent for Malet, and to him unfolded all that had occurred the preceding evening.

"I have had the entire Third Section at work all day looking for the pair," he said, in concluding his story "and not a trace of either of them can be found. Malet, are the only man who can find them for me, you must do it."

"Your highness," replied Malet, "the men of the Third Section have been afraid to tell you the truth, which is, that half an hour ago the countess, accompanied by a man named Nick Carter, passed the border of Russia into Germany on a private passport granted them by the czar, in person, and that the railway guards were especially ordered to give them every protection."

And the grand duke, who happened to be looking at his watch at that moment, threw it upon the floor stamped upon it, in his rage.

But all the same, Nick Carter and the Countess Tierney were safely out of the reach of his anger.

THE END.

The next issue of the new series of Nick Carter's detective adventures, No. 381, will be entitled "Crime Behind the Throne; or, Nick Carter and Palace Mystery." It will be one of the most thrilling of the tales of the great detective's adventures in all countries, and will describe how he solved a mystery which had successfully puzzled the greatest and most efficient detectives in Europe. The great O'Malley, or Malet, as he prefers to be known now—will be throughout the pages of this story as an assistant to the "Little Giant," and the secrets of a stupendous nihilist plot will be revealed.

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